



January 27, 2000

Ms. Janice Marie Wilson  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
Dewitt C. Greer State Highway Building  
125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2000-0302

Dear Ms. Wilson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID # 131609.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information relating to complaints filed by certain individuals. You state that the department has released some of the requested information. You claim that other responsive records, which you have submitted for our review, are excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

Section 552.107 provides in relevant part that information is excepted from required public disclosure if

it is information that the attorney general or an attorney of a political subdivision is prohibited from disclosing because of a duty to the client under the Texas Rules of Evidence, the Texas Rules of Criminal Evidence, or the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct.

Gov't Code § 552.107(1).<sup>1</sup> Although the scope of section 552.107(1) would appear to be co-extensive with that of rule 1.05 of the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct,

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<sup>1</sup>We also note your references to sections 552.101 and 552.111. At one time this office did apply section 3(a)(1) of the former Open Records Act, the predecessor statute to section 552.101 of the Government Code, in determining whether information was excepted from disclosure under the attorney-client privilege. More recent decisions make it clear, however, that a claim that information is excepted from disclosure on the basis of attorney-client privilege generally is governed by section 552.107. See Open Records Decision Nos. 574 at 2 (1990); 575 at 2 (1990). We do not understand you to be raising a claim under section 552.111.

which prohibits an attorney from divulging “confidential information,” this office has concluded that such an interpretation of rule 1.05 would be in potential conflict with the purposes of chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 574 at 4-5 (1990) (construing predecessor statute). Accordingly, this office has determined that section 552.107(1) protects only what rule 1.05 describes as “privileged” information, *i.e.*, information that represents confidential communications between attorney and client. *Id.* at 5. “Unprivileged” information, as defined by rule 1.05, is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.107(1). *Id.* Thus, section 552.107(1) excepts from disclosure only factual information or requests for legal advice communicated by the client to the attorney and legal advice or opinion rendered by the attorney to the client or to an associated attorney in the course of rendering legal services to the client. *Id.* at 7-8. You state that the records you have submitted concern confidential communications between an attorney and non-attorneys within the department for the purpose of providing legal advice. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted records, we conclude that the information we have marked is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

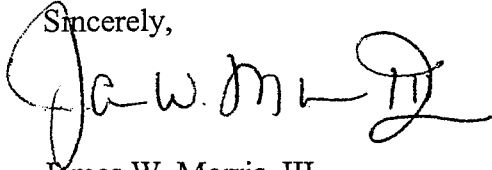
This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.W. Morris III". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

James W. Morris, III  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JWM/ch

Ref: ID# 131609

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Mohammad F. Farhoud  
6910 Hart Lane, #403  
Austin, Texas 78731  
(w/o enclosures)

